

A popular internet encyclopedia defines the term "character actor" as: One who predominantly plays a particular type of role rather than leading ones. Character actor roles can range from bit parts to secondary leads. However, character actors often play supporting roles, characters not subject to a major change or revelation in the course of the plot, and whose role is less prominent.

I recently took a poll on a popular social networking site asking, "Who are some of the greatest character actors of all time?" I received back several mentions of such leading actors as, Dennis Hopper, Gary Oldman, Harvey Keitel, and Philip Seymour Hoffman. I wondered to myself, "why are people not mentioning the likes of whom I have always deemed as career character actors like J.T. Walsh or someone like Paul Dooley.

The guys that have really stood the test of time hiding behind others, wearing that perfect mustache, and stealing the best scenes in some of my favorite movies from the 'stars' of the film. . These are the guys I really love. These are the guys that make these movies great.

You could probably fill the Grand Canyon with everything you don't know about Paul Dooley. He was born, Paul Brown in Parkersburg, West Virginia on February 22nd, 1928. As a young man, Dooley made an attempt at working as a clown, as well as drawing various comic strips for his local newspaper and college.

After college, Dooley enlisted in the Navy at the tale end of World War II, spending time at sea around Japan. Finishing his service in the military, Dooley went to New York City to pursue an acting career. In the early/mid 1960's Dooley took to the stage, trying his hand at stand up comedy, appearing on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson several times. In addition, Dooley worked as the comedy writer for the Mike Nichols and Elaine May team, and a comedy sketch show built around Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara. The '70s would find Dooley a hugely successful television commercial actor in New York, as well as see him as the lead writer on the big time children's television show, The Electric Company. He would leave New York City in the mid '70s to pursue an acting career in film in Los Angeles.

Dooley received his big break when he was cast by Robert Altman in the 1978 film, A Wedding. The film would co-star the likes of Carol Burnett and many others. From there, Dooley took on the role of "Ray Stohler" in a quirky little film released in 1979

called, *Breaking Away*. The film would become the little movie that could, earning Academy Award nominations for many involved as well as accolades across the pond in England. Dooley's performance is epic and touching, and it's still talked about today, 30 years after the film's initial release. *Breaking Away* would cement Dooley's feet firmly in Hollywood, and would convert him into something we now consider...a national treasure.

It's been 30 years since *Breaking Away* and Dooley has remained - steady as he goes. He's appeared in hundred's of television shows, and dozens of films - the previous earning him several Emmy nominations over the years. Dooley has turned in some memorable performances in films like, *Popeye*, *My Boyfriend's Back*, *O.C. & Stiggs*, *Sixteen Candles*, *Strange Brew*, even voicing "Sarge" in the fun 2006 Disney/Pixar John Lasseter film, *Cars*, and it's 2011 sequel.. He's worked with every major director over the last 40 years from Robert Altman and Steven Soderbergh to Christopher Nolan and Christopher Guest.

Most recently, Dooley appeared on television in the sleeper hit of 2010, *Huge*. Written by Dooley's daughter and wife, Savannah Dooley and Winnie Holzman the show is a ABC Family drama about coming of age teens during a summer at a camp for the overweight. The show received critical praise from many, including the New York Times who called it, "One of the best shows of 2010." Sadly, the show was canceled after it's first season for low ratings.

Chatting with Dooley is a privilege. He's so wonderful to speak with and so damn funny. He's spouting off amazing stories, lucid tales of the golden age of comedy in New York City, he's doing impressions of people he's worked with like Bobcat Goldthwait. He's quick, to look at his life and career from a retrospective standpoint. Dooley's story is that of a truly great American actor.

For some, Dooley will always be "Samantha's Dad" in the John Hughes classic, *Sixteen Candles*. For others he may always be thought about as "Wimpy" the hamburger loving sidekick of Popeye in the 1980 Robert Altman film. Or, perhaps to the current generation, "Joe Sosniak" on ABC Family's *Huge*. One thing for certain, Paul Dooley is more than just "that guy from that one movie" on the big screen or at home in your living room. He's a comedy legend, a true contributor to that finished cinematic product. The art of movies.

JUSTIN: First off, you're 83 years young now. How do you keep doing it?

PAUL DOOLEY: I don't know. My parents must have given me good genes I guess. They didn't live this long even, but I've been blessed with a great immune system. I'm in great health, I've never been in the hospital, and I've never had a major illness and I think I look fifteen years younger than I actually am. I walk on my treadmill three days a week, and I go to Pilates three days a week too.

JUSTIN: Even though it's been canceled from television, I was a big fan of Huge. I thought it was really wonderful, and I loved your character. Where do you think you channeled him from inside you?

PAUL DOOLEY: There something that exists in me that's not of my doing. I often get cast as guys that remind me of my father. Like in Breaking Away. I based that character on my own dad. Partly through being type cast, I've played about 35 or 40 of these guys over the years. These guys are just like my dad, and every other dad in the world in that don't know how to show their love and affection to their kids, especially their male children. I guess what evolves and what comes out of my performance is something that tells the audience that I don't mean it, and underneath that - I'm OK. I'm kinda a rascally guy with a heart of gold. The heart of gold part is nothing I'm doing. It's just apparently something that comes out. It must just be part of me somehow.

I told a reporter once that the repressed apple doesn't fall far from the repressed tree. Cause my dad, and all of my friend's dads in the neighborhood growing up were all the same. The only way you could bond with your son was to take your him hunting or fishing. God knows they can't put their arm around them, once they're past age two.

JUSTIN: Peter Yates just passed away a little while ago. What was your experience like working with him on Breaking Away?

PAUL DOOLEY: A lot of people ask me about what it's like working with certain directors. They always wanna know how's it like working with this director in comparison to another director. My answer is very simple. I've very rarely had a director tell me to do less of this, and more of that. My wife, thinks that's

attributable to the fact that I'm probably doing the role more or less the way they wanted it to begin with. Plus, if they're casting me, they probably already know how I'm gonna do it. I did five or six movies with Robert Altman, and he never told me how to do a scene. He just always went along with what I was doing. That's what it was like working with Peter Yates. He was very easy going, and when it was right, he never bothered telling you anything different. We never did a lot of takes. He turned you loose on the part, and if you did it the way he thought it should be, he'd never say anything to you.

On the press tour for *Breaking Away* it was myself and Peter traveling around promoting the film, and we got to know a little more of each other than we had while we were shooting the film. So after we'd do our question and answers, we'd have dinner together each night. He was a good guy. When people ask me about him I tell them, "He was a British gentleman." Peter was a great director

JUSTIN: You've done a few films with Christopher Guest. You guys have a fun something in common in that you both were in *Death Wish* together. Even though you didn't have a scene together in the film, did you met him on the set?

PAUL DOOLEY: No, I had met him much earlier than that. In fact, his mother - was my agent once. I was in Second City, and Alan Arkin was there at the same time I was. I was looking for an agent at the time, and Arkin suggested I met his agent who was - Jean Guest, Chris's mother and I signed with her. I also had a part on this improv television special on PBS called, *Nice Place To Visit*. Chris also had a tiny part in that. That was the first place I met him I think

JUSTIN: I know you have a stand up comedy background. I was wondering if you could tell me your best joke from those old days?

PAUL DOOLEY: The thing is, I was never really born to be a stand up guy. I never had the 'chutzpah' to go out and fight an audience. Any comedian will tell you that in the first five years of doing stand-up you're gonna get your ass kicked by an audience. First of all, their drinking. Second of all, their with a girl and they're thinking about going home and getting laid. Third of all, the males in the audience are in competition with the comedian, cause if he's funny - the girl in the audience is liking him. So in a sense, their in a hostile relationship with the comic.

When I started out it there was a trend starting. It was going from the joke telling era of like Milton Berle and Allan King to Robert Klein and Richard Pryor, where you could get laughs for being smart and clever. It became observations about life and how the comic felt about his own life.

So I came along, and I approached stand up as an actor, even though I grew up loving jokes. I didn't feel comfortable getting up there and telling joke after joke like someone like Rodney. So I did little sketches with only one person in them. These pieces of comedy we called them, "Hunks". My act was thirty minutes or something. I had five or six "Hunks." They weren't - joke, joke, joke, they were mostly situational or behavioral routines. I did a western from the point of view of the Indians. I did a Shakespearean parody. I read a Czechoslovakian fairy tale using jibberish Czechoslovakian and translating it wrong.

A guy who helped me write some of these was Alan Alda. He was a just beginning then. He's a very very good writer. We used to meet for dinner and talk over ideas. I got on The Tonight Show. On my third visit to The Tonight Show I didn't have a piece of material that I liked so Alan and I wrote that together. So I didn't do jokes, I did routines. You know something they were so unpolitical and so untimely in terms of pop culture, that they still work today. Sometimes I get asked to do benefits, you know get up for five minutes and I'll use them. They worked then, and they still work now.

JUSTIN: It's my understanding that your given birth name is [Paul Brown]. Out of curiosity, where does the name 'Paul Dooley' come from?

PAUL DOOLEY: When I was younger I always drew pictures. In high school I met a guy who drew cartoons for the high school newspaper. When I saw those I never wanted to draw unrealistically ever again, I wanted to do what he was doing. He was doing cartoons, and he was quite good for a high school kid. Then I started to read magazines like the Saturday Evening Post. Whatever I could get my hands on. I wanted to be a cartoonist. So for about five years I did quite a bit of cartooning. When I was in college, I thought I should have a pen name, cause all the big cartoonists would just sign one name or their initials.

I wanted a name that sounded like it belonged to a funny person. I wrote down a bunch of Irish names, not because I'm Irish necessarily - it just sounded like a writer with an Irish name would be funny. I wrote down like, "Clancy O'Tool", "Dooley", "Rooney." I thought to myself, Mickey Rooney has the best name in the world. Both his first name and last name end in Y. His name sounds like fun, and it has a great rhythm. So, I decided on, "Tom Dooley." But after I did some research I discovered that there was a "Tom Dooley" that got hung. Then there was another one that was a doctor in the south, that was a do good missionary folk hero. In college I also did some clowning and I named the clown "Dooley" for that as well. Then I found out about a guy in New York, an actor named, "Paul Brown" that was in the film version of South Pacific.

So I couldn't use the name "Paul Brown" and be in the Screen Actors Guild, cause there was already a guy using that name. For example, Craig T. Nelson or Michael J. Fox. No one starts out with an initial in their name. They put that in there cause there is already someone using that name in the Screen Actor's Guild. So I took, "Paul Dooley." It has a ring of comedy to me.

When I was drawing cartoon's I'd sign the name "Dooley" and I used to put eyeball's in the double O's. Sometimes I'd put speed lines behind it so it looked like it had wheels and was taking off. Clouds of dust behind my name.

JUSTIN: So what types of cartoon's did you draw?

PAUL DOOLEY: In my hometown paper I illustrated a column for the sports columnist. Then I did the panel cartoons there too. I also did a comic strip in my high school newspaper about hillbillies that was partly inspired by a then popular strip called, Snuffy Smith. In my college humor magazine I did panel cartoons. In high school I drew posters and I did a big mural in the cafeteria. I'd work on it every day. It took me like a year. It was a huge project. It was just a bunch of cartoon images - people carrying trays, sitting down at tables.

I still follow cartoons, and that's why it was a huge thrill for me to play "Wimpy" in the Popeye movie. But that was all Robert Altman. He just offered it to me. He had no idea that I liked cartoons. If Altman liked you, he really liked you. That's why he always kept a stock company of sorts. Same thing that Christopher Guest does. When I first started to work with Altman, I said to my then girlfriend, "If I don't screw

this up, I could be in the next few Altman films."

JUSTIN: Did you join the Navy cause of what was happening with the war, or was that something you were planning to do all along?

PAUL DOOLEY: Well, I was graduating high school at the time, and all of my friends and I had similar draft numbers. Even though they signed a treaty to end the war, they don't just drop everything, they don't stop drafting. They consider it an emergency for at least a year after it's all over. So a couple of my friend's got drafted, and I figured I was next. So I joined the Navy cause I figured there would probably be less marching and less shooting. I decided that I'd rather be on a ship that sank then in a foxhole. It seemed romantic and adventurous. But, it was just as boring as being in the army or something I'm sure. I was on a ship in the pacific. I was back and forth in the south pacific going to Japan, China, and the Philippines, places like that.

JUSTIN: So having that military experience, do you think your experiences there helped you as an actor later on?

PAUL DOOLEY: I wouldn't say so, no. I can't think of any types of people that I would've met in the Navy that would have influenced me. I was just always influenced by the people I had seen in the few movies that I had seen, and all the people I had heard on the radio, like Jack Benny or Burns & Allen. By the time I got out of the Navy television was just taking off. So I was influenced by things I saw on television like The Colgate Comedy Hour. Originally I was more interested in jokes, than acting. The acting came later. I'm old enough to admit to having had the experience of doing black face in high school theater. How shameful is that, how demeaning? I don't put that on my resume. I'm a junkie for comedy. I like broad comedy, I like sophisticated comedy. Burlesque comedy. I like it all. I like Noel Coward, Mike Nichols & Elaine May, Andy Kaufman - stuff like that.

JUSTIN: Can we talk about one of your earliest film roles that you did? The Parisienne And The Prudes aka The Bashful Bikini (1964)?

PAUL DOOLEY: Yeah. I remember that title. I can't find that film on the internet. I found a newspaper clipping of it. There's a picture of me with the director. I think it

might have been the first film I ever made. I don't have a memory of doing it. I can't remember if I had three lines in it or fifty. I'd love to find a copy of it.

JUSTIN: You've worked with Dennis Christopher quite a few times. Can you comment on the chemistry that you seem to have when you work together?

PAUL DOOLEY: Yes, we have a great chemistry. We are still close. We still see each other. I go see him in plays, and he comes to see me in plays. We get along very well, and I think that's because of when we worked on Altman's *A Wedding*. Altman always set it up so that you work so close together that it becomes almost like a family. There is something about it that creates a bond. We did *Breaking Away* as father and son and the last thing we did together recently was an episode of *Law & Order*.

JUSTIN: Do you feel like you've been under-used as a actor over the years?

PAUL DOOLEY: Yes I do. I'm grateful for how much I've been used however. I've done over 60 films. But I was 49 years old when I got my first really big part in Altman's *A Wedding*. Before that I was only doing films where I had one day parts. Hardly a success at age 45. I only blame myself for not having more of a career, I was playing it cautiously. Back in the '60s and '70s in New York City I was very successful financially doing television commercials and Broadway.

So when I have to consider something like, should I go to Hollywood and try to get an agent, then go to auditions, take a chance just to see if I can get a feature film role or television show - is it worth it? I didn't have much experience with that, and they don't really respect you if you're just someone that does television commercials. I didn't want to take the risk. At that time I had a wife and a family. I had three kids by then. So I just played it safe.

I think I was destined to be a character actor. I've always felt like I'd be more comfortable if I was wearing a fake mustache. I think I always wanted to be a character actor. Hiding behind some character like you do in sketches. If you scratch a star, you'll usually find someone that's ambitious. If you're sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring, that's not assertive. I have just enough low self esteem that I didn't wanna blow my own horn when it probably would've been a



good idea for me to do so. I've never called a director and said, "what's going on, I'd love to work with you again." I never had the balls to do that, and I was always too shy. I didn't wanna look like I was begging. I figure - they know I can act, they used me before. If they want me again, they'll get a hold of me. I've just never been that pushy, but I've made piece with that years ago. With the reviews I got on Breaking Away, people still talk about that performance. I left right after for Malta to film Popeye. I was there for six months. So I wasn't around to experience the reward of Breaking Away. I couldn't take any meetings, I wasn't around to do any press. Popeye just came at the wrong time. I wish it would've been different, but you can't change that. So I'm philosophical about that, not bitter. I'm lucky that I've had a talented life even.

JUSTIN: What was it like for you working with John Hughes on Sixteen Candles?

PAUL DOOLEY: Well, he didn't tell me much. He told me he was a big league fan of mine. When I went in to meet him, he told me he wanted me to play the father in the movie. But I hadn't read the script yet. So my agent and I took the script with us and read it. At that time, it didn't have that great middle scene in it yet. So my agent said, "let's not do this, cause you got such wonderful reviews from Breaking Away and this role isn't really a showcase part." So we turned it down. A few months passed and I wasn't really offered anything better. So Hughes called me and said, "Paul, I wrote this really great scene for you, and I think it's gonna convince you that you should be in our movie. It's a nice scene." So I read it, and decided to take it. In the script I read initially, the parents were really only in it for the first three minutes at the beginning, and then again in the final three minutes. Hughes was trying to beef up the part of the father. He told me later on that he was glad that he wrote that scene cause it grounded the film in a reality that the film didn't have until it appeared. That scene puts an anchor under the movie, and it turned out to be a good part for me.

JUSTIN: Putting your work with Robert Altman aside, did you get the opportunity to do improv in other projects?

PAUL DOOLEY: Oh sure. Because I do it with Larry David in Curb, and also with Christopher Guest. Plus, I get to do improv all over town, in these little venues in Los Angeles. We have a little group of alumni from Second City where we all get together and do long form improv for 1 or 2 hours at a time. For about a year we'd get together at the Friar's Club on their dark night. A lot of people that I've worked

with over the years like [Dan] Castellaneta from The Simpsons and Ryan Stiles from Whose Line Is It Anyway?, we get together from time to time, and have continued to do so over the years. It comes and goes.

Once I played at a place every week for about two years on the Santa Monica pier, and we'd have to our my friends cause the venue didn't have a normal big crowd. So we'd kinda become our own audience. It's not something you generally get paid for, and they calling it "playing".

JUSTIN: So how did you get cast in Strange Brew (1983)?

PAUL DOOLEY: I asked Dave Thomas why he cast me, cause he didn't audition me. I did a show on 46th street. It was an evening of Jules Feiffer's cartoons. So after we started working together I asked Dave Thomas why he called me, and he told me that he had seen me in that show. He told me he was a fan of Breaking Away, and also he thought that I was the type of guy that could laughs without having any jokes.

JUSTIN: One of my favorite roles that you've done that never get's any mention is your performance in the 1993 film, My Boyfriend's Back. Was that a fun project for you?

PAUL DOOLEY: Yeah. You know the original name for the film was gonna be "Johnny Zombie." Bob Balaban directed it. The leads of the teenagers were unknowns. The support cast was amazing. Edward Hermann, Cloris Leachman, Mary Beth Hurt, Austin Pendleton.

JUSTIN: I love that movie. I love how your character is constantly antagonizing people. Do you have a favorite line?

PAUL DOOLEY: I come into a place and my son is dead. By the way, my son in that movie was played by Phillip Seymour Hoffman. He was about 17 when we did that. In the scene he's got an ax in his head. So he's long gone right. I come in and say, "oh my god my son...oh my god my son.." Austin Pendleton is playing the mad

scientist. He walks up and says "well he's not doing as well as we expected..." He's giving me all these reports, "his vital signs aren't very good.." Then I said, "what do you mean you idiot - he's dead!" He looks at me and says, "Everyone's a doctor..." Brilliant line. That's a great line. I was also at one point a skeleton in that movie too.

JUSTIN: You've done a lot of writing in your career as well, right?

PAUL DOOLEY: I've done some comedy writing in my life. For a year I was the head writer on a sketch show for Jerry Stiller and Anne Mira. I knew Ben Stiller when he was four years old. Their show wasn't in all the major markets, but it went out to around 75 cities. Also, I was the head writer on the children's show, The Electric Company.

JUSTIN: Yeah that's right! How in the hell did you come to be the head writer on The Electric Company?

PAUL DOOLEY: Well, over the years I've done a lot of television and radio commercials. We used to have a little company where we'd write commercials for companies. So I got a call from the producer, and they knew I had all this experience writing little comedy commercials. They hired like eight writers with comedy and commercial backgrounds. So after about eight weeks, right before they were about to go into production they called me into the office, and asked me to be the lead writer. All the other writers were pissed, cause essentially, I was the boss of my own peers. I came up with the character "Easy Reader" which I based off of the movie title Easy Rider, they wanted something like 'The Count' on Sesame Street. Morgan Freeman played him.

I created "Jill Of The Jungle." I came up with, "J. Arthur Crank." Both Sesame Street and The Electric Company had the same producers. I was only there for a year, then left. I wanted to go back to acting. The show went on for another six years.

JUSTIN: Also, you worked with one of my favorite directors, Steven Soderbergh. That seems so random, how did you get involved? The Underneath (1995) is a great film, don't you think?

PAUL DOOLEY: That was a remake of a Burt Lancaster film called, Criss Cross (1949). I don't know how I got involved in that, I think I just got a call, cause I didn't audition. I get about 2/3 of my work by it just being offered to me. Soderbergh was wonderful to work with. I liked him cause he worked like Robert Altman. He was trained as an editor, he cut things through the lenses. He didn't have to get all that wasted coverage that the studio insisted on. I liked him a lot. I worked with Peter Gallagher on that film too, he'd been a friend for years

JUSTIN: So at 83 years old, and with this prolific body of work, does Paul Dooley still have to audition?

PAUL DOOLEY: I do. I just auditioned last week for a television series. I'll audition for anyone, even if he's the biggest guy in the business. I'm not proud. I love to work, but I don't need to work. I have a pension from the Screen Actor's Guild . I just enjoy working.

JUSTIN: What do you think your legacy will be after you're gone?

PAUL DOOLEY: I don't know. People like Breaking Away and people like Sixteen Candles. I've done so much work that I doubt that people who like me can even name more than 3 or 4 things I've done. I once worked with Charles Durning in a play. One night there was a group of fans that came up to us and asked for our autographs. I asked him, 'how do you handle these people, and you know that they don't even know who you are?' He told me, "I tell them I've made 125 movies, name one of them." I looked at him and said, " I know you and I can't name more than 5 films you've been in, and I'm an actor."

So I think the legacy will be like that. Like Durning, I always do a good job. So I think people will say, "I don't know the names of most of your movies, and I haven't seen all your movies, but when I see your name, I know that this movie is probably a pretty good movie." Secondly, there is a level that Charles Durning doesn't fall below. Meaning that no matter how bad a script is, he's still Charles Durning. So I guess I'm kinda in that league, if anything.

JUSTIN: On that note, of all the work you've done to date, do you have a favorite performance?

PAUL DOOLEY: Sure...Breaking Away It's very personal to me. It's my dad, it's a real character I know. I'll tell you a phenomenon about it. My son comes into the scene and he's just been hurt. The Italians have just knocked him off his bike. He's bruised, he's crying, and he comes over to me. Remember I'm playing my own dad from my own life. I'm in my head, but in my dad's body, and I'm my dad. The kid comes over to me, so who is he? He's me. Before I was an actor, right? I reach out and embrace him. In the script it said that he doesn't quite know how to hug his own son. I couldn't do it at first.

So here's an actor, me - playing my father with another actor, whose playing that guys son, who would be me as my own dad. It was a very rich moment, I was comforting myself. Yet as my father, the part of me that was my father, I was having difficulty showing emotion. At the end of it, he got out of it brilliantly. He said to the wife, "Say something." Basically he was saying - get me outta this, I'm in the middle of a huge. "Say Something Evelyn." Then you cut to her, and her eyes are brimming with tears. There's no question, that's the best thing I've ever done.